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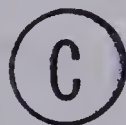
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Thesis
1969 (F)
127

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BEOWULF: THE COMITATUS AND THE MONSTERS

by



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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
EDMONTON, ALBERTA
FALL 1969

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for
acceptance, a thesis entitled Beowulf: The Comitatus
and the Monsters, submitted by Rosemary Keough in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I propose to study the Beowulf as an allegory in which the three monsters represent related aspects of man's mind in a primitive society, aspects which, taken together, determine the evolution of the comitatus as a heroic system, and its eventual transcendence into a Christian framework. Chapter I will examine the substance of the poem and conjecture what the selected material can tell the reader about the purpose of the poet in making such a selection. In Chapter II the role of the hero will be contrasted with the role of the monsters, in an attempt to redefine the lines of structure in the poem. The final chapter will involve a personal interpretation of the theme of the poem, discussing the monsters as personifications of the human characteristics of egotism, vengefulness and greed, characteristics which the structure of the comitatus encouraged but which ultimately proved destructive. In conclusion I will summarise the relationship between the structure of the poem and this allegorical interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Tolkien's lecture in 1936,¹ criticism on the role of monsters in Beowulf has divided itself into support or refutation of his main thesis: that the monsters are symbolic. There seems to have been little attempt to use his work as the basis for further investigation, extending the symbolic role of the monsters into an interpretation of the poem, and relying on internal evidence of the poet's theme and his intention. This lack has been noted by Bonjour:

Far from begetting a brood of symbolical interpretations, all differing in their conclusions, Tolkien's achievement still stands in splendid isolation.²

In order to devote the maximum space to an extension of Tolkien's ideas, certain assumptions about the poem have been taken for granted in this thesis. I presuppose one Christian poet who is writing of a pagan past, with some deeply serious intention, the significance of which would be apparent to his audience. The poem has unity, in that all parts of it relate to his central theme. It is a mistake, therefore, to speak of digressions and episodes, if by this terminology any lack of coherence is implied. In the same manner, one should not attempt to separate the poem into historical and fabulous "elements," as if they are not inextricably woven into the pattern of the meaning.

Basically, the poem consists of descriptions of three different confrontations between a man and a monster. In the successive fights, the power of the man to overcome diminishes, as the power of the monster to defeat him increases, until the final fight involves mutual destruction. If the poet intended his audience to identify with Beowulf, and if his purpose was in some way to deepen the Anglo-Saxon understanding of life, the theme of the poem would concern the role of the hero, and

his relation to the role of the monsters.

The dilemma which Beowulf incorporates as a hero is that he is required to act in a way which will destroy the society which has created and justified him. In other words the poet is describing the contradiction which the heroic society enshrined: that the hero cannot be the king. The elegiac nature of the poem stems from the poet's realization that the heroic society, the comitatus, is doomed to extinction because of the way it is structured. The required behaviour of a member of a comitatus is personified in the three monsters, as much as it is epitomized in Beowulf himself. Professor Whitelock imposes a severe limitation on the poem when she stresses that

... any man of the audience might find himself suddenly forced to become an avenger by necessity, perhaps in circumstances that involved his acting counter to his inclinations and affections.³

The message and relevance of the poem to an Anglo-Saxon audience is not that the dilemma of "an Ingeld or a Hengest" might one day confront them, but that the dilemmas of Beowulf and the monsters are those of any member of a comitatus. Any man could find himself an exile, like Grendel; any man could find himself an avenger, like Grendel's mother; any man might find himself a guardian of treasure, like the dragon.

CHAPTER I

BEOWULF, THE MONSTER-KILLER?

The coherence of Beowulf relies on the audience's appreciation of the poem as a tale of three monsters. The hero's function is to provide the unity between the three fights, and to embody the theme of the poem.

Tolkien's lecture in 1936 attempted to redefine the structure of the poem by forcing the critics to concentrate on the substance of the actual fights against the monster. In doing so Tolkien discarded the purposes which he was well aware the poet did not have in writing the poem:

... Beowulf was not designed to tell the tale of Hygelac's fall, or for that matter to give the whole biography of Beowulf, still less to write the history of the Geatish kingdom and its downfall.¹

Tolkien's analysis of the poem as a hero's fight against three monsters was a necessary critical contribution at the time, but the emphasis of his lecture was on the structural basis of the poem rather than the symbolism of the three monsters. Support of Tolkien tends to concentrate, therefore, on his structural analysis, while critics who disagree, do so because they feel that the symbolic analysis of the monsters as evil, does not penetrate deeply into the similarities and differences between the three. Stanley supports Tolkien by saying that, "The Anglo Saxons read the poem as an account of Beowulf the monster-slayer."² There is no doubt that to read the poem in such a way is to appreciate only the most superficial of all the levels of meaning in the poem. Most critics feel that there are other levels of much deeper significance. The area of controversy covers the identification of these layers as either social, moral, or religious. If the levels are religious, then there is widespread critical debate about whether or not the poet's intention is specifically Christian. Goldsmith feels "that we have here a skilled Christian poet, who has chosen to retell the story of a pre-Christian hero in such a way as to impart certain moral lessons."³ Most critics also agree that it is in the interpretation of the monsters that these certain moral lessons will be contained:

... why with so many heroic stories at his command did the poet choose Beowulf's fight with the Grendel kin and the dragon as the high points of his poem? I do not find any satisfactory answer to this except the answer offered by Professor Tolkien, that the monsters, though indisputably living and breathing creatures are symbolic of the powers of evil.⁴

But to group the three monsters under the general heading of "powers of evil," seems to reduce the poem to a rather obvious allegory of good versus bad. If this had been the poet's intention, the poem would have remained a fairy tale, like Jack - the giant killer, and it is surely more than that:

Had he allowed the fabulous, or mythical, element drastically to encroach upon the purely human plane, the poem would have been little more than a fairy tale; had he remained too abstract when depicting the hero's mission, the high symbolism of the fights, which is never obtrusive, would have run the risk of being reduced to mere and obvious allegory.⁵

Tolkien's statements on the nature of the monsters, rather than the importance of the monsters, are not as comprehensive and perceptive as the poem deserves, and it is with those statements that this thesis will disagree. "They are creatures," he observes, "feond mancynnes [enemies of mankind], of a similar order and kindred significance."⁶ And elsewhere he refers to them as

"... a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life)."⁷

It follows necessarily that if the monsters are seen as completely bad, the villains of the story, then the hero must be completely good, ideal in every respect. When reading the poem, however, it strikes us that the three monsters are different from each other. They possess characteristics which excite our sympathy in different ways and for different reasons. But not one of them arouses a completely negative response of hatred alone. Beowulf, on the other hand, does not emerge as the faultless personification of good. He is doomed, certainly, by fate. But he does possess the ἁμαρτία of the tragic hero of drama, because the hero is the ἁμαρτία of the heroic system. Beowulf himself cannot recognize this, but the audience can. The tragedy for us is that both Beowulf and the monsters are, in varying degrees, a subtle combination of wicked monster and wretched man.

This identification between the hero and the forces that he fights, is supported by certain of the old Norse sagas. Chadwick notes that Bothvarr Bjarki shows "a strange but unmistakable affinity with his supernatural enemy."⁸ Bjarki's enemies are of a very similar nature to Beowulf's. The northern hero fights Agnarr the bear, Skuld a valkyrie, and an unnamed winged monster. It is with Agnarr that Bjarki is most closely identified, the name Bjarki having a possible meaning of "little bear." In the Grettis saga the hero's name is Grettir, which, like Beowulf, is a name of rare occurrence. Chadwick thinks it is possible that the name has a troll connotation, that the hero is represented as a rather sinister outlaw figure. On linguistic grounds there is a possibility that Grettir is "a Norse form derived from grandi" of which the corresponding Anglo-Saxon could be Grend-il. She concludes:

Is it possible that in origin Grendel and Grettir are identical, and that in the Norse story, the monster has been transformed into the hero - that a story, originally told from the monster's point of view, has left traces on this strange and capricious, pitiful yet very sinister, outlaw?⁹

Recent criticism has followed this line of thought, in particular with relation to Grendel. Baird writes that, "Grendel partakes of two natures - monster and man."¹⁰ He is both the "Christian demon and heathen outlaw." Sympathetic interpretations have been extended also to Grendel's mother:

His mother, on the contrary, is activated by the laudable desire for revenge and, besides, is sought out in her own home; hence a certain amount of sympathy is manifestly due her.¹¹

For the dragon it is hard to feel exactly sympathetic but we do feel that his ire is aroused by the man's theft of a cup, rather than from any internal unmotivated malignancy. In spite of the differences between the monsters, and the different response of the audience towards them, the reader still feels that the monsters are in some way connected, at least symbolically. Bonjour writes:

I am still tempted to believe that if we probe the analogies which clearly bind the monsters together, ... we shall find that they far outweigh the differences.¹²

But while he stresses the characteristics which are in common, he still feels unable to ignore,

... the fact that the difference in the outcome of the Grendel and the dragon fights may logically enough imply a certain distinction as to the significance of Beowulf's adversaries.¹³

Our interpretation of the monsters must accept the fact that although the monsters are different, they are related in meaning.

It is only recently that criticism of the poem involving sympathy for the monsters has also involved discussion of Beowulf's "fault." The difficulty of admitting that Beowulf has a "fault" is that one has to accept that, according to the rules of conduct of his society, he was also ideal. In which case it is not Beowulf himself who is being criticised, but the role he is forced to play. His lack of identification with any historical character, his non-alliterating name, and his non-involvement in actual historical events point to the fact that the poet wished Beowulf to remain a rather isolated, archetypal figure. His position is that of a famous hero who becomes a king. He is not identified closely or positively with a race or tribe for the purpose of glorification. He is, rather, isolated from time and historical events. Chadwick has noted that it is, "remarkable that the great Anglo-Saxon poem does not celebrate an English hero and events."¹⁴ It is possible that this too relates to the poet's wish to regard the hero, and the structure which revolves around him, as abstractions. Practically speaking, if his regard of the comitatus involved any criticism, it would be preferable for the poet to avoid any kind of identification with historical or living dynasties, which could lead to the same kind of retribution as was suffered by the scop in Deor.

Quite recently, Leyerle has analysed the role of the hero in the comitatus, and found that the code exalts the will and valour of the individual while he remains a hero under an overlord, but that once he becomes king, the hero is expected to act for the good of the society. Leyerle calls this "the fatal contradiction at the core of the heroic society,"¹⁵ which he says is the theme of the poem. This accords very well with my own idea of what the theme of the poem is, but I find that there is more than one contradiction involved in the structure of the comitatus. My full support goes to his identification of the poet's

intention, in which he says that "The poem presents a criticism of the essential weakness of the society it portrays."¹⁶

This weakness does not, however, involve just the hero's disintegration as he becomes king. It involves the fact that allegiance to one's lord, conflicted quite often with allegiance to one's kin. Moreover, one could not guarantee that a lord would always act in such a way that one would want to support him. A man who was promising in his youth was capable of experiencing a great change of character, and the system had no means of disposing of an unsuitable ruler. He was there until he died. The society also depended on having something to fight, and something to be given in exchange for fighting. It was therefore dependent on hostility and treasure as much as on courage and nobility. The system of revenge on a killer, by the taking of his life, would involve a last survivor, which if carried to the extreme, would result in the extinction of all humanity, not just one particular tribe. Perhaps this is the reason for the mention of Cain, and for the identification of Grendel, "in Caines cynne" (107) [on the kindred of Cain] since the action of Cain in killing Abel would initiate such a disastrous pattern of retribution. The punishment of exile was similarly inclined to be destructive to the society which had banished the person, since, as life was practically impossible unless one belonged to a group of some kind, the natural tendency of exiles was to join up with the enemies of their original group. All these criticisms are embodied in Beowulf, sometimes in symbolic form, sometimes in actual events.

Because criticism of the heroic society seems to be the "stuff" of the poem, this thesis will not be concerned with the pagan/Christian controversy. It seems rather heretical, after all the effort which has been expended in discussion of this problem, to dismiss it as futile. Nevertheless, the poet does not seem to have considered an important part of his theme, that the heroic society decayed because it was pagan. Naturally, the poet, as a Christian, would be aware of the fact that the decline of the comitatus was a good example of how earthly things did decay. He is not, however, trying to externalize the conflict which was within the comitatus by blaming either "wyrd" or the "almightig". It

is Beowulf who does this, not the poet. The poet is also sensitive to the glories of the pagan society, he admires and respects it, and the poem contains praise as well as blame. There is no moral message which equates all good with Christianity and all bad with paganism.¹⁷

When one examines the actual causes for which most historical heroes have gone off to fight, particularly Germanic heroes, one can see the difficulty that the poet of Beowulf faced in trying to make his hero sufficiently "ideal". The man - versus - man conflicts which occur in Beowulf are motivated by ambition, treachery, greed and divided loyalties. If Beowulf's heroic exploits had involved any such confrontations in which he was acting on his own responsibility rather than that of Hygelac, he would have been identified with these motives and qualities. His failure, and the failure of his tribe, could then be assigned to man's bad qualities triumphing over his better ones, which is not what the poet is trying to describe. The monsters are, then, apart even from the allegorical significance which this thesis gives them, essential to the poem because they give the hero something suitable against which to fight. One must also recognize their real or literal value, for

... a symbolic interpretation does not, after all, exclude a literal interpretation; it contains it. The dragon, for instance, can be both a universal symbol and a very literal and particular monster.¹⁸

If we leave aside, for the moment, an analysis of what the symbolic interpretation might be, and turn to the text itself, the structure of the story seems to emphasize the importance of the monsters. Of the 3,182 lines of text, roughly a thousand lines are devoted to each fight. If the poem was intended for oral delivery, the recitation could have occurred in three successive nights.

The interesting point about this division is that each part contains little else except for the fight and a brief summary of what had gone before or what had happened in the meantime. Beowulf's fifty year reign, his youth, all his exploits apart from the three fights, are relegated to a second-hand reporting of the event.

In opposition to this view of the poem as a tripartite structure, some critics have struggled to make the unity of the poem rest on some-

thing other than the harmony between theme and structure. Dubois asserts that the poem is about the greatness and the fall of the Geats.¹⁹ The theme is apparently, then, concerned with the depiction of the last great representatives of a race. The poem divides into two halves, an artistic balance being maintained between them. Tolkien likewise conceives the structure of the poem as a balance, in this case between youth and age, "the contrast of rising and setting, achievement and death."²⁰ Tolkien's view was occasioned partly by the need to reply to Chambers and Ker, both of whom criticised the poem for its structural lack of coherence. Today it seems odd that a critic should feel that it was necessary to state that, "the poet was modelling his materials purposefully, instead of merely stringing together heterogeneous curiosities."²¹ Now we assume the unity, and assume that what is omitted is irrelevant, and what is inserted is important, and is inserted at that particular point because it is necessary there and no where else. The pattern which was in the poet's mind does not seem to have been based upon chronology. There is, of course, no reason why it should be. As Fisher points out: An epic is surely not a biography, nor a chronicle, nor a mythology, although it draws upon all these.²² Everything in the poem is subordinated to artistic design, even consistency in factual detail. Nevertheless, a great deal of effort has been wasted in attempting to justify the poet's inconsistencies, as if the lack of consistency were part of the design. Sisam defines the structural purpose as an effort "to stir the imagination by broad impressions or suggestions, not to guide it by a series of consistent images sharply defined."²³ Leyerle sees a relationship between the structure of the poem and the interlace designs which occur on Anglo-Saxon crosses, brooches, and book decorations. In an extremely interesting and well-illustrated article he shows how these designs were formed by continuous threads, plaiting and twining about themselves, sometimes forming knots and sometimes the heads of animals, usually that of a serpent or worm of some kind. Leyerle sees the Beowulf as a poetic analogue of these interlace designs, and for the purpose of this thesis it is significant that the designs in their pictorial form were lacertine, and that he names the monsters as the most important narrative thread in the

poem. His description of the poet's structural purpose is that ... it is an organizing principle closer to the workings of the human imagination, proceeding in its atemporal way from one associative idea to the next²⁴

The important balance in the poem is not between the beginning and the end, but between the folk-tale origins and the historical origins of the events in the story. The historical thread weaves in and out between Beowulf's supernatural exploits in such a way that the resulting story is neither pure entertainment nor pure statement of fact. The only human adversary that Beowulf encounters is Daeghrefn. But Beowulf is also the only human to encounter a supernatural adversary. In this way it is emphasized that in the poem the superhumans are Beowulf and the monsters, and that just as the monsters are too strong for an ordinary human being, so Beowulf is too strong for an ordinary adversary. Beowulf is represented as ideal, by the fact that he is the only one who is able to be a monster-killer.

Because of this ideal quality, Beowulf is ultimately destructive to himself and to his tribe, as is shown in the developments of the three fights. Rogers has indicated that the successful outcome of the fight is in inverse proportion to Beowulf's dependence on the comitatus, the use of weapons, and the treasure gained.²⁵ In fighting Grendel, Beowulf uses no weapons, he gains no treasure, he needs no help. It is at this point in the story that Beowulf is farthest away from the qualities embodied in the monsters he is fighting. His individualism is no threat to himself or his tribe because he is bound to serve both Hrothgar and Hygelac. He has no death of a kinsman to avenge, and his concern over armour or treasure is merely so that Hygelac should have returned what rightly belongs to him. In the second fight Beowulf borrows a sword, has need of a magical one, and is motivated by Hrothgar's desire to have Aeschere's death avenged. He does, however, still resist the temptation of the treasure in the cave. In the final fight he requires help, weapons, and stresses the fact that his motive is to pay back the dragon for the night ravages, and to gain the treasure which the dragon is hoarding. He fights against the advice of his counsellors, who realise that the dragon's death is not as important an occurrence as Beowulf's life. He leaves his tribe to face ruin

when he dies, because tribal warfare will follow. Beowulf has failed to realize that his function as a king is to preserve the future of the tribe, rather than to preserve his own reputation as a warrior, most eager for praise. He has continued to enact the role of the one who is at the front of the line in the battlefield rather than the one who is available on the "gifestol" in the mead hall. His individual acts of heroism which separated him from the rest of his comitatus when he was a warrior continue to separate him from his people when he is their king. Beowulf is a protector who refuses to become protected. In these ways he is more dangerous to the system than the dragon. While the dragon provides the comitatus with an external hostile force which can be overcome, Beowulf as a hero weakens the system from within, in a way which can never be resolved unless all heroes die young as a matter of principle before they can become king. Beowulf as a monster killer becomes the monster which is ultimately most destructive, because he cannot be overcome by the comitatus or the race of which he is the leader. Beowulf's "monstrous" characteristics cause his own death and the destruction of the heroic system, as well as the death of the three monsters he was fighting. Beowulf the monster-killer has become a monster.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLES OF THE PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST

Greenfield distinguishes in the following way between the role of the hero in epic, and the hero in drama. The epic hero wishes to preserve the way of life in the society of which he is a part. When a fight confronts him, he feels that his path is clear; he must fight, coute que coute. The dramatic hero approaches any battle, struggling against the ambiguity of the choice it presents. His suffering is internal; he knows that he is creating an individual destiny for himself and that he will be judged accordingly. Greenfield concludes that "Epic flourishes in the last days or in the aftermath of a nation or a Weltanschauung not in the heyday".¹

The role which the epic hero is required to play is connected to the fact that the society supporting or surrounding him is in its decline. He feels that he can somehow stop the process. The elegiac or tragic tone of the poem stems from the fact that the poet and the audience know that such an attempt is futile. Other characters in the poem feel forebodings concerning the outcome, and can prophesy disaster and catastrophe. The hero, although he can see the possibility of his own death, regards it as a sacrifice which must be made willingly in order to gain something else. Other characters in the epic may see that this is in fact a useless sacrifice, that the death of the hero will involve the larger death of a community or city. An epic society is only as great as the heroes it produces. The greater the degree of awareness the hero has about the uselessness of the sacrifice of his life, the greater the tragic effect.

The strange quality about the role of Beowulf in the poem is that having linked his destiny so closely with that of his community, we are still left with the fact that Beowulf is a figure who is very much alone in the world:

Throughout the epic narrative, the emphasis is placed on the solitary nature of the hero's task. Beowulf appears to live and fight alone. His three battles emerge as three distinct judgements wrested from fate by

an intrepid and completely individual mind.²

... both monsters are solitary fighters in their feud with mankind - and it may be by no sheer coincidence if Beowulf, who is the best of men, and represents what is best in man, systematically expresses his resolution to fight alone against the dragon, as well as the demons. There is probably a little more in this than a wish to emphasize the extraordinary fighting capacities and exceptionally heroic character of Beowulf.³

Is this isolation a feature of all epic heroes, or is it Beowulf's alone?

The basic difference between Beowulf and the other epic heroes seems to lie in the fact that, whereas those who, like Aeneas, act in accordance with the rules of their society, prosper, and those who disobey, like Hector and Achilles, die, Beowulf dies for the very fact that he has obeyed those rules. If there is a fault in Beowulf, it is as much a fault of the society as a failing of personality. The fault is that in the Germanic system, the required behaviour of the hero is not the required behaviour of the king. Other epics, as well as romances, recognize the essential difference in function, temperament and behaviour of the two roles. They feature two personalities: Arthur and Lancelot, Agamemnon and Achilles, Priam and Hector. Other epics devote the hero to a higher cause, as was Aeneas, or to the gods, as was Odysseus, so that the hero remains subordinate. But Beowulf is required to grow from the hero to the king, and he cannot, even though he was ideal as a hero. The quality which betrays him is his individualism, a superb desire to rely on himself, a quality which was required and fostered by the rules of the society, for the leader of a comitatus. The theme of the poem and the role of the protagonist in Beowulf is peculiarly Germanic, because the poet is concerned with the faults of the Germanic tribal system. There are, however, many similarities between Beowulf and the other heroes.

There is a special quality about the epic hero which elevates him above the stature of ordinary men. This quality takes many forms. The hero may be descended from the gods, he may be physically superior in some way, or he possesses, perhaps, some extraordinary power which is not normally given to man. He is usually on a quest of some kind, the object of which will not bring material reward to the finder, but has

spiritual significance. His motives in attempting the quest are selfless; it is someone else's loss or helplessness which the hero desires to make good.

There are two types of quest on which the hero may embark. The first is patterned around a voyage, and the hero and the foes are superhuman. The second is a quest involving heroic warfare against human enemies who are of the same kin, and the resulting battle is mutually destructive. These two types of epic are defined as such as by Levy.⁴ Beowulf can be viewed as a combination of both types, or a development from these two types into something else. Beowulf, as a hero, conforms most nearly to the pattern of the heroic warfare type since he is not of supernatural origin and his final battle involves mutual destruction with an adversary who is of a kind it not kin. The actual fights in Beowulf resemble a voyage involving supernatural enemies who are met on this voyage, rather than warfare between two human enemies. Beowulf does also show resemblance to the other heroes who suffer from excess of pride, a quality identified by Levy as μεγος, "the heroic energy which is a sign of their divine ancestry and upon which their leadership depends".⁵ Μεγος is a dangerous quality, belonging to heroes of the second type of epic, and it is responsible for whatever catastrophe occurs, through a conflict between the hero's μεγος and his duty to society. In characterization, Beowulf belongs to the heroes of the second type of epic, but he is called upon to perform a role in the first type of epic.

He is, in character, nearer to Achilles, Lancelot, and Hector than to Aeneas or Arthur, because his failure in the last fight is a failure of loyal duty. It is not that he fails to perform what he feels is his duty. He can never be accused of failing to try to be of service to others. His is not quite the "exaggerated individualism" of the adolescent Achilles⁶ who puts himself first, and his society second. But because he is still acting within the terms of the rules of his society, Beowulf likewise avoids the moment of realization, when the truth of his error, or the truth of his useless sacrifice, comes home to him.

Neither for Beowulf nor for the audience, is his death the tragic event of the usual epic hero, because of this lack of self-knowledge. As an audience we are also spared the knowledge that the hero has killed an antagonist who is as worthy as himself. The most we feel about the dragon is that Beowulf has slain the embodiment of his own worst qualities, and our sympathy is excited because we feel that the comitatus decreed that both Beowulf and the dragon should act as they did. Levy writes that: This recognition of a common relationship with the enemy is impossible in the myth-bound epics, where the antagonists are monsters.⁷

It is true that the recognition between Achilles and Hector of the worth of the other, and the tragedy of the subsequent killing and outrage on the corpse of Hector by Achilles, constitute another tragic element which is absent from Beowulf, because Beowulf does not recognize any bond with the dragon. But as the audience, we feel the bond between the hero and the monsters because the society approves of the human forms of exile, avengers, and hoarders, while it disparages them in their monster form. If the dragon had been a human figure, seeking to get repayment for the theft from his hoard, the stature of Beowulf would have been diminished and the cause of the hoarder seems more justified. As the story stands, the audience welcomes the death of a dragon in a way that it could not welcome the death of a human. We are faced again with the proposition that the poet and the audience have a knowledge which the hero does not, and the tragic and elegiac tone of the poem comes from our knowledge of the significance of the events rather than from the events in the story themselves. One factor in Beowulf's isolation lies, therefore, in his isolation from the audience. The destructive explosion of the hero's μῆνος is against our intellectual conviction and not his own.

A second aspect of Beowulf's isolation is that he lacks a positive and permanent human figure with whom to build a human relationship. During the course of the poem he is connected emotionally with Hrothgar, Hygelac and Wiglaf. The first two relationships involve a flow of feeling from Beowulf to Hrothgar and Hygelac which is returned. In the case of Wiglaf, there is no relationship mentioned at all, until Beowulf seems to be dying in flames and the rest of the comitatus flee. Then

Wiglaf remembers his kinship with Beowulf and comes to aid him. The feeling flows from Wiglaf to Beowulf, not vice versa. Beowulf does not speak when Wiglaf joins him; he does not thank him once the dragon is dead. Wiglaf is a convenient dramatic audience for the dying speech, but the whole scene does not have the basis of a personal relationship which would build up poignancy. Sigemund and Fitela seem much more closely connected, although not in the same way as Achilles and Patroclus. Beowulf has neither wife nor child, and for all his concern for the safety of his men, it is hard to forget his apparent unconcern over the death of Hondscio. If Beowulf had lamented this death, as Hrothgar laments Aeschere's, our sympathy with Beowulf would have been greater. It does seem that the poet is concerned to keep Beowulf apart. When we see him in the first part of the poem it is as a successful leader of a group. At the end he is isolated from them:

The heroes of the ritual cycles, although their quest was solitary, were victorious or defeated in company with the whole of nature and the heavenly powers, but the protagonists of heroic epic, even if fighting among comrades and watched by the gods, could shape their lives and deaths once only, and therefore, ritually considered, in isolation.⁸

Beowulf chose to be alone and the choice was wrong.⁹

The final point in connection with Beowulf's isolation is that other epic heroes always seem to be bound by fate, or directed by the gods. The gods figure as personalities and they are the source of action and the outcome. Although Beowulf stresses that fate has control over him and all men, and he is always careful to appeal to God as well, we are left with the feeling that he exercises self-control once he has made a verbal commitment. The Christian God could not appear as a figure in the poem and so is bound to be a more nebulous figure anyway, but the whole Christian concept of freedom of choice has had an effect on the poet's conception of the hero. This, plus what I feel is the essential paganism of Beowulf himself, as revealed partially in his consistent motivation to win praise and glory, accounts for his isolation from any deity.

From the evidence of the poem we have some idea of the extent of Beowulf's charisma. The shoreguard says:

... naefre ic maran geseah
 eorla ofer eorþan, ðonne is eowersum
 secg on searwum.

(247-249)

[Never have I seen a mightier noble upon earth, than is one of you a warrior in his armour.]

Although he does not yet know Beowulf's identity, he prophesies a successful outcome to the battle. Wulfgar is likewise impressed with Beowulf:

... huru se aldor deah
 se þaem heaðorincum hiðer wisade.

(369-70)

[Surely the chief is brave who has led these battle-heroes hither.]

The poet himself says that Beowulf is the strongest of mankind in might, but the exploits of Beowulf if taken literally point to more than this. His hand grip, for instance, is equal to the grip of thirty men (379-81). In his youth he joined in a swimming match during which he was in the water for the conventional space of seven nights and slew nine sea monsters. He is able to sever Grendel's arm from his body, and yet Grendel is so large that

... feower scoldon
 on þaem waelstenge weorcum geferian
 to þaem goldsele Grendles heafod.

(1637-1639)

[four of them had with difficulty to carry on the battle pole, the head of Grendel, into the gold-hall.]

When he is pursuing Grendel's mother, Beowulf is able to swim under water for the good part of a day, "þa waes hwil daeges" (1495), and in the course of the fight he uses a sword which had belonged to giants and is therefore, "mare ðonne aenig mon oðer/to beadulace aetberan meathe" (1560-1).

[greater than any other man might carry to the battle play.] Beowulf's "super-power" is his handgrip. However literally or poetically we are to take the other examples of epic hyperbole, there is no doubt that the poet

intends us to believe that Beowulf's is a special gift given to him for a special purpose, and that it is on this power that Beowulf should rely, because it was given to him from a supernatural source. The more Beowulf relies on his handgrip the more successful the fight.

Initially in fighting Grendel without a sword, he says he will do it so that Hygelac will be glad, "swa me Higelac sie/min mondrihten modes bliðe"(435-6). His second reason is because he does not want to take unfair advantage of his opponent, and Grendel does not know how to use a sword. Finally, the audience learns that Grendel is invulnerable to all swords, so that if Beowulf had used a sword it would have been useless. In the second fight, Beowulf plunges into the mere equipped with Hrunting, which fails him, and he abandons it, deciding to trust his strength once more:

... strenge getruwode
mundgripe maegenes.
(1533-4)

[he trusted to his strength the handgrip of his might.]

In his final fight, Beowulf makes no reference to his special gift, and wears his armour and shield, killing the dragon with a knife. The moral of this does not seem to be that Beowulf did not trust in himself enough, but that he did not trust in others enough. His fault, a consideration of which we have now come to, is that he is self-reliant to a fault.

Levy defines this quality, which is peculiar not to Beowulf alone, but to the tragic heroes of epic. The hero was "solicitous only to maintain the freedom of intact honour, where personal prestige was the sole source of integration."¹⁰ The quality of self-reliance is one that is encouraged by societies which have a rather slight political organization, or by times in which migration is taking place. When a hero becomes excessively self-reliant, he tends to make the wrong choice when confronted by a crisis because he is concerned with his own reaction to it and not the reaction of his society.

Twice Beowulf deprives himself of help when he is to enter into a battle. The first time he is right to do so. He rejects the use of sword and armour in fighting Grendel not merely because he will thereby

earn more fame and glory but also because he does not want to take advantage of his opponent's ignorance. But his motives in depriving himself of the help of his comitatus in fighting the dragon are questionable. Before stating his intention, Beowulf reviews his life's conquests, mentioning lastly the killing of Daeghrefn, whom he had also crushed in his grip. Then Beowulf says

... gyt ic wylle
frod folces weard faehðe secan
maerðu fremman

(2512-4)

[once more will I, the aged guardian of the people, seek battle and get renown.]

He says that "wyrd" will decide between the dragon and himself, as to which one of them will be successful. He does not put his trust in God. Moreover he will fight with shield and corselet because he does not

... wiste hu
wið ðam aglaecean elles meahte
gylpe widgripan

(2519-21)

[know how else I might come to grips with the monster to fulfil my boast.]

The word "gripan" expresses Beowulf's desire to use his special gift in some way, but he does not know how to. It is significant that at this stage Beowulf is in this state of "not knowing". When we come to the interpretation of the monsters, we shall see how Grendel is always in this state of ignorance. To him, realization brings death. Beowulf never comes to realization of what he could, or should, have done in his final battle to avoid disaster. He tells his comitatus to watch from a distance.

Nis þæt eower sið
ne gemet mannes, nefne min anes
þæt he wið aglaecean eofodo dæle
eorlscype efne.

(2532-35)

[This is not your affair nor proper for any man except myself alone, that he should put forth his strength against the monster, do heroic deeds.]

In other words, no one may take the role of a hero upon himself because Beowulf wants the glory. He is, of course, the strongest man alive, so the most suitable for the deed, if it were one that necessitated a dual

combat. There can only be one reason for deciding that there should only be two combatants and that is that the glory of the victor would have to be shared if there were more. So Beowulf says,

Ic mid elne sceall
gold gegangan, oððe guð nimed
feorhbealu frecne frean eowerne.
(2535-2537)

[I through my bravery shall win gold, or battle, the dreaded life-destroyer, shall take off your lord.]

His secondary motive is to win gold for his people or die in the attempt. There is no mention of the fact that his death is controlled by God or fate. If Wiglaf had not come to the rescue, the fight would have ended with Beowulf dead and the dragon very much alive. This would have been a disaster, but not one of much greater magnitude than the actual disaster in which the gold is buried once more, and the lack of a suitable leader brings about the downfall of the people Beowulf thought he was serving.

Apart from the fact that in this final fight Beowulf does not put his trust in God, there are other signs that Beowulf's conception of his role as king is a mistaken one. Wiglaf tells Beowulf that he must, "ealle maegene/feorh ealgian" (2667-8). [protect thy life with all thy might.] Such fatherly advice is obviously the poet's, since it would be most improper in the mouth of the young subordinate. If Beowulf had taken this advice and made the conservation of his own life his first consideration, this would have involved the rejection of himself as hero. The hero's supreme act was dying in service.¹¹

It seems possible that the poet is trying to draw a distinction between the hero's supreme act and the supreme act of a king. If we examine the roles of the kings in the poem, we can see that their supreme act was to preserve their own life until the moment when they had also preserved a rightful and safe succession. In the poem we have four kings who fail to provide an heir who can succeed at the right time, and in each case disaster overtakes the leaderless, or child-ruled society. Even Scyld, who in other ways was a "god cyning," failed either to abdicate soon enough, or to provide a son who was old enough to rule at the appropriate time. The son recognizes this:

fyrendearfe ongeat
 pe hie aer drugon aldorlease
 lange hwile.

(14-16)

[he perceived the sad distress which they, lacking a lord, had suffered formerly for a long time.]

The poet's inconsistency in making the old Hrothgar have two very young sons probably relates to the same theme. Although Hrothgar's motivation in refusing to fight Grendel himself is the one that Beowulf should have adopted in not fighting the dragon, he still does not leave a secure succession, because enmity breaks out between Hrothulf and Hrethric and Hrothmund. Hygelac also dies leaving a young son Heardred, who cannot possibly hold the throne securely. When Beowulf dies, his regret is his lack of an heir:

Nu ic suna minum syllan wolde
 gudgewaedu, þaer me gifede swa
 aenis yrfeweard aefter wurde
 lice gelenge.

(2729-32)

[Now I would wish to give my son my battle garments, if it had been decreed that any heir, issue of my body, should come after me.]

Again Beowulf's state of ignorance is apparent. He does not realise that the importance of a son is more than as a recipient of his father's battle-gear. However symbolic the gesture, Beowulf's confidence in the circumstances of his own death is amazing. He wants to "gefean habba" (2740) [have joy], he wants to see the treasure "paet ic dy seft maege ... alaetan lif ..." (2749-51) so that I may calmly leave life. He desires an earthly monument, he desires sight of the gold, which he finally remembers to thank the Lord for allowing him to capture. There are two puzzling lines added by the poet as a comment on the death:

... naefne goldhwaete gearwor haefde
 agendes est aer gesceawod.

(3074-5)

[unless greedy for gold more eagerly had he before looked at the owner's legacy.]

These can be taken to mean that Beowulf was not, but became, avaricious, or that he, if he had known about the curse, would not have looked upon the gold as eagerly as he did. Either way the picture of a man,

greedy for gold, gazing upon treasure, is not an attractive one. Klaeber feels that the intent of the passage is a declaration of Beowulf's innocence, but this is a debatable issue.

The final area of Beowulf's excessive self-reliance concerns his inability to take advice. Unferð says that no man could dissuade Beowulf from the swimming match (510-11), Hygelac advised Beowulf not to undertake the fight against Grendel (1995), and Wiglaf stresses that all had counselled Beowulf not to fight the dragon (3080). In spite of this, these people have nothing but praise for him. It is only in the first two instances, however, that Beowulf's knowledge of himself is greater than that of those who uttered the warnings. Telescoping the different aspects of Beowulf's fault, we can see that it involved a final lack of self-knowledge, an excessive concern for praise, a desire for treasure to excess, and a refusal to listen to others. The message of the poet is not to disillusion the audience about Beowulf's character, but to stress that he only became this way because his role as a hero had decreed this. His deterioration is not physical:/ his sword breaks from the force of his blow (2681). It is not a failure of himself in the role of the hero, for he is still a worthy protagonist when he dies. It is the failure and the deterioration of the comitatus which required him to be what he was and then required him to change.¹²

The role of the antagonists requires less complex analysis because the main feature of the monsters is that they can all be seen as unhappy human figures, who are forced into wickedness by the way society treats them. They are evil, enemies of God, creatures of the underworld or hell, figures of death, because these are terrifying appellations and the monsters that Beowulf fights must strike the Christian audience and the pagan dramatic audience within the poem with fear, or they are not worthy antagonists. But the symbolic meaning of the monsters, which will be elaborated in the final chapter of this thesis, does not rest on an identification of them with Christian devils, or Northern myths. They show parallels with the monsters of the sagas, just as the Christian poet parallels them with the evil which is the enemy of good, but their specific meaning is that they are enemies of the comitatus and the heroic society.

As such, they must be made as human as possible, in order to show that it is the internal human members of the comitatus who will destroy the structure and not the external forces which attack it. Grendel's appearance is left purposefully vague. We know by indirect references that he has hands, arms, shoulders, eyes and a head. By direct description we learn that he has claws on the ends of his fingers, and that a horrible light shines from his eyes like a flame. The references to his "striding beneath the clouds" point to a figure of tremendous size, and the fact that the door to Heorot falls open at a touch points to his tremendous strength. The words which are used to describe Grendel, identify him as a creature from hell, a spirit, or a human enemy. We are also told that he was "mara pone aenig man" (1333) and that he was "on weres waestmum" (1352) [in human form]. There is only one word which has the possible meaning of monster and that is the word "aglaeca". Most translators take great liberties with the words and add the connotative meaning of a monster to words which do not actually carry any such suggestion. The idea of Grendel as a monster seems to exist in their minds rather than in the poet's words. There is, of course, the behaviour of Grendel to be considered. His most monstrous act is the greedy, animal-like devouring of Hondscio. He is a "mudbona" (2079) [mouth-slayer]. This act and his sub-human hands are the only two instances where one could feel that this is a monster rather than a devil or a man.

I give these three possibilities because the word "aglaeca", which is the most definitive of the words applied to Grendel, has those three interpretations as monster, devil, and man.¹³ In Old English poetry the word is applied to Grendel, his mother, the dragon, sea-beasts, but also to Sigemund, Beowulf, and St. Andrew. The modern word "monster" is derived from the Latin "monstrum", which means "a divine omen," "an evil omen," "a fearful thing," "a terrible wonder." When, as an audience, we translate "aglaeca" as monster, we should then be thinking of something which is extra-ordinary, something which is to be wondered at or admired. We would, therefore, quite happily translate the word as monster when it is applied to Beowulf as well as to Grendel. Most translators, however, prefer to substitute "hero". The two adjectives which

are most frequently applied to "aglaeca" are "atol" and "earm," suggesting that the monster is to inspire both pity and fear. The other word which describes Grendel as something specifically monstrous to look at is the word "eoten" [giant]. I presume that this is to be taken literally. He was a figure of great height and strength.

The most interesting point about all the other words describing Grendel is that they all have more than one denotative meaning. The second point is that they all could refer equally to a human figure as well as to a superhuman figure. For instance, one group of words describe Grendel as a spirit: "ellengaest" (86), "grimmagaest" (102), "wergan gaest" (133). The word "gaest" can be translated as "ghost," "spirit," or "demon." I think it likely that the poet is using the device of synecdoche and that he is emphasizing that Grendel has a spirit or a soul. He is not, then, one who could not suffer emotionally, but one who could and did. If he has a soul, he can also suffer the torments of hell if that is what he deserved. A soulless one, like the raven,¹⁴ never excites sympathy. A second group of words refers to Grendel as "feond on helle" (101), "feond mancynnes" (164), "helruna" (163). The word "feond" means either "fiend" or "enemy". The word "fiend" to a modern audience suggests something particularly devilish, whereas it probably applies to Grendel in the sense of "pagan". He is elsewhere called "godes andsaca" (786) [the enemy of God], and has a "haefene sawle" (852) [a heathen soul]. When he died he went to hell, although this had already been given as his natural environment. The third group of words refers to him as a human criminal, "wonsaeli wer" (105) [unblessed man]. He is here the "enemy" because he is one who does harm to the protagonists. It is this group of words which identify Grendel most nearly as a human antagonist. The word "sceaða" as the second element in a compound means "the enemy," or just "a warrior." In the compounds "dolsceaða" (479), "synsceaða" (801), "mansceaða" (712), it seems as if the first element is descriptive of Grendel as "grim," "hostile," and "a man."¹⁵ Grendel is also given the name of "lað" and "bana" two words which are normally used of the opposing man.¹⁶ He is also a "healpegn" (142) hall-thane, "cwealmcuman" (792) [a murderous visitor], "fyrena

hyrde" (750) [guardian of crimes], "angengea" (165) [solitary one], and a "rinc" (720) [warrior], all of which again are human occupations or habits. Lastly there are some "local colour" words which describe Grendel as being associated with darkness and death: "sceadu genga" (703) [walker in shadows], "deorc deapscua" (160) [dark death shadow].

Irving identifies two aspects of Grendel's humanity by saying that "Not only is Grendel sometimes regarded as a warrior of sorts, he is also viewed ironically as a guest visiting Heorot."¹⁷ But he does not specify the exact purpose of the poet which is to arouse our sympathy for Grendel, because he is concerned with the irony of this treatment. To him, Grendel becomes a comic figure of the "bear with a sore head variety." Such a view of Grendel does not prepare the audience for the final sadness of Grendel's death as an exile, which seems to me to be the poet's intention.

Grendel's mother is a figure who, we are told immediately, will inspire far less terror than a man (1284). She is never described in appearance and she has no name. She has the same claws on the ends of her fingers as Grendel and with these she tries to break through Beowulf's armour. She is able to wield a knife as a weapon, but how she killed Aeschere is not described. She killed him while he was still lying on his couch, but then carries his body away with her, severs his head and leaves it on the edge of the mere. Presumably she ate the body but found the head unpalatable. Her motivation in visiting Heorot is to avenge her son. As such, her primary identification is as a "modor" (1258, 1276). Also used to describe her are "ides" and "wif", both of which mean woman. She, like Grendel, is a guardian of sorts, "grundhyre" (2136) [a guardian of the deep]. Instead of being a housewife she is, however a "mere wif" (1519). The most monstrous descriptions of her are as "brim wylf" (1506) [she wolf of the lake], and "grund wyrgenne" (1518) [cursed female monster of the deep]. These seem to refer not to her appearance but to her behaviour. The wolf is one of the symbolic beasts of slaughter, and the sea-monsters attack any human who enters their world as an intruder who should rightfully remain in his own environment. Her anger and greediness are caused only by the death of Grendel and the invasion of her territory. She does, after all, only kill one man in retaliation. She does

not purposefully select Hrothgar's favourite retainer. The fact that she is a woman, and that the sword blade Beowulf uses melts, has been regarded as having some sexual significance. But the plunge of Beowulf into the lake relates too closely to the journeys of other epic heroes into the underworld to have any such particular sexual meaning. And the figure of the mother follows the pattern of the O.N. female valkyrie, whose purpose was vengeance. The sword is also magical. As Beowulf strikes through the body, a light gleams forth inside the cave. The poet gives his explanation of why the sword blade melts, and that is because the blood it was covered with was so hot and poisonous.

The figure of the dragon fulfils the expectations of the audience. We expect a monster and we get one, vividly described. What we do not expect is that he too should be seen as the human figure of the hall warden, guarding his treasurer against theft, protecting the gold which is the basis on which the comitatus depends. He fights in retaliation, his destruction no more out of proportion than was Achilles', who threatened the whole of the Greek army while he sulked over a slave girl. The dragon dies in defence of his hall, and his body is pushed into the sea as a form of funeral. He is not specifically called God's enemy, but this does not necessarily prevent identification with the evil serpent of the devil's Biblical form, or the "wurm" of the Christian hell.

The dragon is ageless, but his body is mortal. He is fifty feet long and lies in coils. He has wings and flies by night. His teeth are poisoned and he breathes out fire. His existence is regarded by Beowulf as some kind of phenomenon which is a perfectly possible natural event, but probably has some kind of spiritual punishing force behind it. A dragon who guarded treasure was not necessarily an evil figure. By some critics, however, he is thought to be more evil than the other two monsters:

The dragon by contrast represents malitia itself, as a universal, and so comes a long step nearer to allegory than any other figure in the poem.¹⁸ This is one way of stating what most readers feel about the dragon, which is that he does not possess as much human character as Grendel or his mother. He becomes enraged at the thought of man entering his barrow:

he determines on vengeance when he discovers the theft. But he is essentially quite a contented and successful dragon, a feeling which we can hardly be expected to recognize in ourselves. The recurrent emphasis on the human aspect of the dragon is as his function as "hord weard," and it is this that identifies him so closely with Beowulf. Apart from this description, the two most common words used to identify the dragon are "wyrm" and "draca," and compounds of these like "eorddraca" (2712), "fyrdraca" (2689). Like Grendel he is also "feond" (2705), "bona" (2824), "gaest" (2312), and "aglaecaen" (2520). In comparison with the frequency with which these words are used to describe Grendel, it is noticeable that the "devilish" words occur seldom to describe the dragon. He is a "mansceaða" and a "deodsceaða" but one feels this is legitimate dragon-like behaviour. The audience would not expect a dragon who was otherwise. His meaning in the poem must be more heavily symbolic or allegorical because his role is so much more simple. He is just an antagonist to Beowulf, whereas Grendel and his mother are complex figures, hard to describe and to identify, because they are antagonists, but not just against the protagonist.

As the dragon is a simpler and stronger antagonist, Beowulf has become a very complicated protagonist, and correspondingly weaker. The two roles of the protagonist and antagonist are structured in the poem to move in inverse proportion to the other. As Beowulf declines, the force of his opposition increases. The dragon arouses our admiration rather than our sympathy. For Grendel we can feel only pity and little respect. It is for Beowulf at the end of the poem that we reserve our pity.

CHAPTER III

THE EXILE. THE AVENGER. THE GUARDIAN.

Chadwick wrote "The monsters are the very stuff of the hero's spiritual endeavour."¹ Such an approach is obviously in support of some kind of allegorical interpretation of the monsters. Two years later, in 1961, Malone wrote of the monsters that "Grendel, as offspring of Cain, represents the outlaw, the enemy of society At the same time he symbolizes human wickedness at its worst: murder."² Irving recently showed how the poet invites the audience "... to try to bring Grendel into some meaningful and familiar pattern of reference, some relationship to the structure of human society."³ He further identified the type of poetry and Grendel's role:

Beowulf is fundamentally heroic poetry, not theology (pace the neo-Augustinian critics); only in a role that this kind of poetry finds familiar and acceptable can Grendel enter the poem and function in it. He is the rebellious exile, the ymsittend, the neighbour who cannot be tamed, will not pay tribute; refuses to be brought within the frame of social order by force of arms or rule of law.⁴

This approach to Grendel is very much the kind which is the concern of this thesis. If Grendel can be seen in this role in a secular Germanic context, there is no reason why the other two monsters cannot be seen in this way also. If the way in which the monsters act is also the way in which Beowulf acts, although for different reasons, we can assume that the poet is critical of the Germanic context of which he is writing. I think it is possible to show that isolation, vengeance, and greed, are characteristics which all three monsters possess, but not in equal proportions. Grendel is the negative figure, the outcast, and the audience is made to feel his suffering is greater than that of the other two monsters. Grendel's mother is the avenger, and the dragon the guardian. Even in his isolation, Grendel is referred to as a guardian of sins, and his motivation in attacking the hall is to take vengeance upon the sound of the happiness he has heard. Grendel's mother is seen as the guardian of the mere, and she is also an outcast. The dragon exists in complete exile from man, but he does not regard this as deprivation. His motive in

attacking Beowulf's land is to get repayment for the theft and his role is the guardian of the hoard. Similarly, I think it can be shown that Beowulf, and the other humans in the poem, are motivated by the same characteristics as the monsters; vengeance, isolation and greed.

Grendel's state of exile is initially caused by the fact that he cannot fit into the system. He does not know how to fight with a sword, he does not know who his father was. He is physically different from other men. He lives in the moors and the fens which would in reality be the habitat of exiles beyond the burh. It is the sounds of community that enrage him in his isolation. The hall is a symbol of the relationship between the lord and his comitatus. It is here that boasts are made, that treasure is exchanged, that displays of ancestry are given. Grendel is denied all of these. If he destroys the hall, he destroys the relationship as well. At first Grendel does not destroy the actual building because he wants possession of it for himself. The thanes find lodgings in the out buildings and Grendel becomes the guardian of the now deserted Heorot. But he is still alone. He will **not** be bought off by making a peace-settlement - he pays no wergild - and no one is strong enough to defeat him.

Grendel's behaviour at the start of the poem contrasts heavily with his flight and subsequent death. He remains characterized as a human being "guma" (972), "rinc" (720), until the description of his devouring of the corpse of Hondscio. This is a controversial statement because many critics focus attention on him as "grim and graedig" (121) [grim and greedy], "reoc ond repe" (122 [fierce and cruel], "hupe hremig" (124) [exulting in plunder]. They point out that he is enraged, wrathful, that he laughs as he sees the sleeping warriors whom he intends to kill. My own interpretation of this is that we have here ~~an~~ **ironical** picture of the fighting warrior who was expected to be enraged before he fought. Insults have long been a feature of the prelude to battle, where both fighters or leaders met in a verbal exchange before they commenced any physical combat. This custom was designed to make the warrior enraged in order that he should fight better and have a particular motive for attacking the individual against whom he was pitted. Beowulf is described as

"yrre oretta" (1532) [angry warrior], "þa he gebolgen waes" (1539) [he was enraged], "reþe cempa" (1585) [cruel warrior]. As Grendel's mother falls to the floor, Beowulf cuts her body through and through; the sword drips with blood. The poet adds "secg weorce gefeh" (1569) [the man rejoiced in his work]. Beowulf describes himself "ic on yrre uppriht astod" (2092) [I in anger stood upright], as he retells his fight with Grendel.

It is Hrothgar who recognizes the unhappiness of Grendel as an exile when he describes what men had told him about the two figures which had been seen wandering in the waste land:

oder earmscapen
on weres waestmum wraeclastas traed.
(1351-2)

[the other unhappy are who in human form trod the paths of exile.] Other phrases which belong to the exile figure are also applied to Grendel. He is "dreamum bedaeled" (721) [deprived of joys], "werigmod" (844) [weary in mind]. He is in a state of deprivation, "tirleas" (843) [glory less], "dreamaleas" (850) [joyless.] He lives in a "wynleas wic;" (821) [a joyless abode]. The conventional exile figure is portrayed most explicitly in The Wanderer, where the speaker has many similarities with Grendel. He describes himself as "werigmod" (15), he is "bidaed" (20), "freondleasne" (28), and "wineleas" (45). After Grendel loses his arm, he flees into the night, enjoys the sweets of life for a little while longer until death overtakes him. Weary from fighting he lies "on raeste" (1585) [in his resting place]. We remember that Grendel found Beowulf "on raeste" (747), and that Grendel's mother takes Aeschere as he is "on raeste" (1298).

The man who is in exile is a man alone "ana", and this word to describe a state of isolation is applied to various characters at significant moments in their lives. Cain was alone from the moment when he slew Abel and was exiled from the Garden of Eden. Grendel is alone because he sets himself up against all humans, "ana wið eallum" (145) [one against all]. He is twice described as "angengea" (165, 449) [one who goes alone]. The word describes a mental state as well as a physical lack of company. While "an" is usually translated as "a certain one," it is also possible that it contains the meaning of "one alone." Physically speaking, the last survivor is, of course, "an" (2237, 2268,) as he buries the gold, because

it is specifically stated that he is the last of his race. Scyld is also alone when he is sent across the waves in a boat, and Sigemund fights his battle against the dragon alone. But the word does describe a person who is singled out from among a group.

Beowulf himself is most often described as "ana" in this way. He says that he is going to fight Grendel alone, but among his group of warriors. While the rest of them sleep, he alone remains awake, and it is through his special gift of the handgrip that he manages to kill Grendel, without any help except some confused sword slashing in the darkness. He makes it his job alone to fight Grendel's mother. In review of his own life he says that he made it his custom to fight alone at the front of the battle line. When he escaped from Hygelac's raid he was alone, and came back to his own land as an "anhaga" (2368) [a solitary one]. He decides to fight the dragon alone, but Wiglaf is brought to the realization that this final battle would also involve dying alone, which is a fate not deserved by a great leader. Wiglaf also realizes that it is through the stubborn will of Beowulf to be alone that all will suffer.

Wiglaf also is a figure of isolation because he is the one who is in a state of self-knowledge. He is one among the others who decides not to flee and returns to help Beowulf. The bereaved father is alone in misery, among the happiness of those surrounding him; Heremod in his rage and anger separates himself from the loyalty of his comitatus. Hrothgar is called "an cyning" (1885) which can be translated "supreme" but equally could refer to his being alone in misery, since the context describes the fact that old age had deprived him of the joys of power. Hrothgar was in an unfortunate position; he was not able to fight Grendel himself, he could not abdicate, his nephew Hrothulf could not be trusted, his sons were too young to rule his kingdom. Finally, the dragon is alone, living in his barrow, apart from men, and the man who steals from the barrow is twice described as "an" (2280, 2274), which could mean that he was a literal outlaw because of some crime.

Those who are called "ana" in the poem share a common characteristic of separating themselves from others, taking no account of the communal law. Sometimes they do so rightly, sometimes wrongly. The char-

acteristics of man to want to go his own way and make his own rules is just as strong as the opposite trend, to want to conform. The first tendency exerts itself when a system starts to disintegrate. People start to dissociate themselves from institutions. The tendency to put oneself first- seen in its extreme and most dangerous form in Beowulf- recreates a form of exile even if one is still living within the confines of that society. Beowulf ultimately becomes an exile, isolated from the advice and help of his comitatus, secure only in his own vision of himself as hero, rather than the reality of himself as king. In the Grettis saga, Glem curses Grettir: "you shall hate being alone and that shall drag you to your death."⁵ It is both a curse and a destiny to feel the inevitability of a role thrusting itself upon you. Beowulf was not immune to that suffering.

Again and again Grendel's mother's motivation is given as vengeance. The futility of exacting any form of vengeance in human terms was appreciated by the Christian poet:

Ne waes þæt gewrixle til,
 þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon
 freonda feorum.

(1303-1305)

[that was no good exchange that they on both sides should pay with the lives of loved ones.]

Within the terms of the comitatus, payment of money for wrongs suffered, or the "eye for the eye" system of retribution were often necessary to avoid larger warfare. Leyerle writes of the monsters and their connection with vengeance:

In Beowulf monsters are closely associated with the slaying of friends and kinsmen. They function in part as an outward objectification and sign of society beset by internecine slaughter between friend and kin.⁶

In my view, the poet's idea is that revenge is destructive, not only of the victim, but of the perpetrator. The probable cause of slaying one's kin or friends would be that divided loyalties made such an act a necessity. Duty to one's comitatus leader came first, and if his death demanded revenge, then one had to obey.

The characters in the poem who are kinslayers are Cain, and therefore Grendel, because he belonged to the same kin, and Unferð. There are

others in the historical episodes, but these will be related to the structure in a separate section. When Beowulf dies, he rejoices that no one can lay this particular charge at his door:

forþam me witan ne ðearf waldend fira
mordorbealo maga

(2741-42)

[because the Ruler of men will have no reason to chaege me with the murder of kinsfolk.]

Beowulf was fortunate that he was not involved in any of the double dealing which surrounded the reigns of the two child rulers, after Hygelac's and Hrothgar's deaths. He seems to have avoided swearing oaths which he could not keep, and the family quarrels of those he served.

If Beowulf escapes all this, he does not escape from the emotion which is the primary cause of all murder; that is, the desire to have revenge. And it is as an avenger that Grendel's mother plays her most important role in the poem. She is a "wrecend" (1256), and her purpose in visiting Heorot is to "sunu deoð wrecan" (1278) [avenge the death of her son]. Usually the poet mentions that it is a vengeance caused by the close relationship of kin. So he says that she "wolde here bearn wrecan/angan eaferan" (1546-7) [would her child avenge, her only son], and "hyre maeg wrecan" (1339) [would avenge her kinsman]. When she kills Aeschere she "hyre bearn gewraec, beorn acwealde" (2121) [she avenged her child, killed a warrior]. When Grendel's mother comes to the hall it is never mentioned that she is angry. She is always sorrowful and in misery. She makes off with her one prize as soon as her presence in the hall is discovered. When she discovers the intruder in her domain, she is "herorogifre" (1498) [fierce and ravenous], and "grim ond graedig" (1499) [grim and greedy]. But at no time during the ensuing fight is she ever described as angry.

Instead it is the wrath of Beowulf which is frequently mentioned. Beowulf's intention in visiting the mere has already been expressly declared as an act of vengeance:

selre bið aeghwaem
þaet he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.

(1384-5)

[Better it is for each man that he should avenge his friend than greatly mourn.]

Beowulf is bursting with rage during the fight, "werigmod" (1543) when he falls, "sloh yrringa" (1565) [strikes angrily] with the sword when he gets up. When he kills the mother he determines to violate the corpse of Grendel as a final act of revenge upon him for the raids on Heorot:

ac he hraþe wolde
Grendle forgyldan gudraesa fela

(1576-7)

[but he wanted quickly to pay Grendel back for the many raids.]

Beowulf robs the body of Grendel of the head, and he takes away the sword hilt. His is an act of plunder similar to that of Grendel's, the mother's and the man who robs the dragon's hoard. It is hard to say whether these acts are purposefully parallel or are symbolic of something else. It has been noted that Grendel carries a "glof" (2085), which is translated glove or pouch, and that this is made of dragon's skin. The name "Hondscioh" also means glove. Possibly Grendel carries a bag in which to put booty that he steals and the bag and the booty have become identified. In any case Beowulf's is an act of revenge, initiated by a former robbery. No doubt too, it was more satisfying to display the severed head of Grendel, than to assume his death as a result of losing an arm.

The identification between Beowulf and the dragon as guardians of some treasure is even closer than any previous identification between Beowulf and his adversary. The dragon is old, "eald" (2271) and "frod" (2277); Beowulf is "frod" (2413) [aged], "gomela" (2421) [an old man]. When the dragon discovers the theft, he is "gebolgen" (2304), and when Beowulf enters the fight, he is "torne gebolgen" (2401) [bursting with rage]. The dragon can hardly contain himself until nightfall when he can go out and raid to avenge himself. Beowulf immediately also contemplates revenge, "leornode wraece" (2336). There is, however, a qualification in Beowulf's exultation and rage. His heart is troubled with gloomy thoughts, which are not natural to him (2330). His spirit is "wafre" (2420), a word usually translated "restless". But if the uses of the word are examined, it can be seen that the word specifically applies to someone in a crisis who is plotting revenge. Thus the word describes Hengest and his friends

who are the guests of Finn but are plotting to kill him. It is also applied to Grendel's mother as she visits the hall, a journey she does not really wish to make but must in order to avenge her child. The poet does not explain whether this sadness of Beowulf's is a premonition of death or of disaster. The dragon, on the other hand, has joyful thoughts about the work of battle. There is little doubt that the dragon's righteous indignation stemmed from pride in his position as guardian of the hoard. Before he was attacked, the dragon was accustomed to

... lacende hwearf
 middelnihtum maðmaehta wlonc
 ansyn ywde.

(2834-4)

[turn flying at midnight, proud of his treasures, show himself.]

This is a vivid picture, which brings to mind Beowulf, as he walks proudly to the ship which awaits its possessor:

Him Beowulf þanan
 godring goldwlanç graes moldan traed
 since hremig.

(1880-1802)

[Beowulf thence a warrior proud with gold, exulting in treasure trod the green earth.]

Both champions, both "aglaeca" are also "weardas". The dragon is "beorges weard" (2524, 2580) [guardian of the hoard]. Beowulf is "folcesweard" (2513) [guardian of the people]. The purpose of this kind of identification is revealed by a study of others who are "hyrde" or "weard" in the poem.

They share the characteristic of protecting what they feel is their personal treasure. For Hrothgar it is the rings which he distributes (921); for the last survivor it is the treasure which was once the pride of his people; for the shoreguard it is the rocky cliffs which mark the boundary of his land; for Hygelac, Hrothgar and Beowulf it is also the people of whom they are the rulers. Wiglaf becomes a guard at the head of his dying ruler. Daeghrefn, the standard bearer, dies protecting the flag which is his treasure. It is an ironic comment by the poet on Beowulf's behaviour that Beowulf describes this event in the speech which he makes before he advances into the dragon's cave. He states that Daeghrefn could not bring to his king the treasure of the armour which he

had captured. In connection with this point, Beowulf strips the bodies of thirty men he has killed, and swims away with their battle gear on his arm, an act which can be viewed as a robbery. This could be included to show Beowulf's strength, or to comment on his desire for treasure, or it could be a poetic way of saying that he killed thirty men.

The function of the "weard" is then to acquire treasure as well as to guard it, or to be given it from a higher authority. This leads to a discussion of what the symbolism of the treasure of the dragon's hoard might be. Perhaps first the practical function of treasure should be considered. As Leyerle says, "The strength and security of heroic society depends on the symbolic circulation of treasure."⁷ The relevance of this statement to the story of Beowulf is that the essential thing about treasure was that it should remain in circulation. As the poet points out, those who merely watch over the treasure in order to hide it from others, do not profit at all by it (2277). Treasure in circulation was handed from father to son, it indicated ancestry, it was a reward for bravery, it was used to buy peace or favour or warriors, it was an ornament. Treasure, or the ownership of it, could also be disastrous. The custom of wearing war-booty led to resentment if a relation of the original owner happened to see the display.⁸ The story of the last survivor intimates that the destruction of his race was connected with the vast accumulation of treasures. Hygelac's raid was undertaken with the primary purpose of gaining treasure. The symbolic exchanges of treasure took place within the mead hall even though the treasure was won on the battlefield. The treasure was in fact symbolic of the spiritual relationships which should exist between the lord and his thane. But the relationship should be such that it would endure without the material exchange. Even if treasure were exchanged, there could be no absolute guarantee that the recipient would remain loyal, as Beowulf and Finn found out to their cost.

The treasure symbolises anything to anybody which that person considers of value. The mead hall is the symbol of the protection which the guard erects around his treasure in order to prevent others from stealing it. What the poet is pointing out is that true treasure is, in fact, not liable to theft, decay or wrongful usage because it is a spiritual or

moral or emotional quality. The treasure that Beowulf should be protecting at the end is the safety of his people; the treasure they should be protecting is Beowulf's life. There is a consistent poetic motif of the treasure in a hall, protected by someone, and the hoard is raided by an intruder. This pattern is reflected in different ways, and sometimes reversed, until the poet comes to the Christian theme that the soul is the most precious treasure given to man.

The first use of the pattern is of Heorot, the hall guarding the comitatus itself, and in this case Grendel is the intruder. As Grendel destroys the comitatus, he takes over the function of hall guardian. Beowulf's fight with Grendel can be seen as a fight for the right of ownership. Even the buildings which house the treasure react to the owners or the intruders as if they had personal feelings about the situation. For instance, when Grendel comes to the hall, the door is described as "recedes mupa" (724) [the mouth of the building], as if the hall itself were a hostile animal. Beowulf's ship is described as joyous, "wynsumar" (1919), and it awaits its owning lord like a tethered horse, riding up and down on the waves waiting for him to come on board (1882). Beowulf and Grendel are both called "renweardas" (770) [guardian of the hall], as they fight for the right to the title. Grendel's mother again plunders this hoard and she steals part of the treasure, Aeschere, a thane most precious to Hrothgar. As Beowulf and his men set out in retaliation, they follow the tracks she has left:

Lastas waeron
... wide gesyne.
(1402-3)

[Her tracks were widely visible]

Grendel's mother has in her hall her own treasure, her son's body and the normal golden hoard. This time Beowulf is the intruder, he is called the "selegyst" (1545) [the hall visitor]. The thief is the first intruder upon the dragon's hall. He leaves his tracks as Grendel's mother had done and the dragon examines the "feondes fotlast" (2289) [the enemy's footprint]. The dragon's hoard is actually described as a hall, "dryhtsele" (2320), "hringsele" (2840). Just as the monster intruders were "ladan" to

man, so the human intruders here are "lādun menn" (2627).

Almost unawares the poet turns the final treasure hoard into a heathen legacy and contrasts it with the Christian treasure of the soul. He makes specific gnomic statements concerning the uselessness of the hoarded gold which are not called for according to heroic ethics:

Sinc eade maeg
gold on grunde gumcynnes gehwone
oferhigian, hyde se ðe wylle.

(2764-6)

[Treasure, easily may, goldin the ground, get the better of any man, conceal it who will.]

When the people decide to leave the part of the treasure in the barrow, the poet says:

... paer hit nu gen lifad
eldum swa unnyt, swa hit aero waes.

(3167-8)

[where it still lies as useless to man as it ever was.]

The curse, which is laid on the gold by the great chiefs who had buried it (3070), states that anyone who plunders the gold shall go to hell and suffer eternal torment. Since there is no indication by the poet that Beowulf goes to hell, it is possible that the curse had for the poet a less literal significance. It could be that he is saying that anyone who steals through an excessive concern with material wealth is damned. Spiritual wealth, in the form of the soul, is the poet's estimation of supreme value. He uses the same image of the treasure, the guardian, and the intruder to convey this. Beowulf's death is described as:

... secean sawle hord, sundor gedaelan
lif wið lice.

(2422-3)

[to seek the treasure of his soul, to divide his life from his body.]

The soul is the treasure, and the body is the guardian of it. The poet describes how pride overtakes a man in the same way that death does if a man allows himself to grow lax:

þonne se weard swefed
saweale hyrde.

(1741-2)

[when his guard sleeps the watcher of the soul.]

When Beowulf's soul leaves his body it goes to "secean... dom" (2820) [seek glory]. The soul is an intruder or a guest in the hoards of the life beyond. The image the poet uses to describe this is interesting. For those souls which go to hell, the experience is like that of a welcome guest whose host embraces him:

... sawle bescufan
in fyres faeþm ...

(184-5)

[to push his soul into the fire's embrace ...]

paer him hel onfeng.

(852)

[there hell received him.]

Those souls which go to heaven, go to another guardian "wuldres hyrde" (931) [guardian of heaven].

This is not to say that the poet unequivocally states that Beowulf's soul goes to heaven. We are, I think, left by the poet with a sense that Beowulf will be judged according to what he deserves, and that he will earn his reward for his righteousness, his gentleness and his kindness. The fact that he will not go to Hell, or the pagan underworld, is the message implied in Beowulf's state of ignorance when he dies. This state of ignorance is of himself. He does not experience the sudden moment of recognition which all three of the monsters do prior to their death. As soon as Grendel touches Beowulf's hand, he "sona þaet onfunde" (750) [immediately realized] that he had met his match and his instincts told him to flee or he would be killed. His second discovery "þaet onfund" (809) is that his body is not strong enough for him to trust in any any longer. Grendel's mother "sona þaet onfunde" (1497) that Beowulf has penetrated her lair. The dragon "þaet sona onfand" (2300) that man has discovered his hoard.

Beowulf never realizes that he has fought for the wrong treasure. He cannot, therefore, be blamed for his great desire to see it before dying. He cannot be blamed, that is, by the heroic system, although his actions would not be approved of by the Christian poet. Sisam has noted

that there are six references where Beowulf expresses his satisfaction at the thought of the gold.⁹ Beowulf imagines, however, that the hoard will somehow ensure the safety of his people. He thinks that he has won glory for himself but the gold for them. His motives were both selfish and unselfish. He does not know what they will do with the gold after his death. The sight of the goblets and cups is to him a reassurance that he has fulfilled his function as "weard" and "hyrde."

It is in the historical passages that we find the real moral deterioration because the rulers and the comitatus degenerate with full awareness of what is happening to them. Beowulf remains a hero even while the fault is found with the heroic ideal. But the poet gives us real, human instances of the faults in man causing the decline of the heroic ideal, of which the supernatural monsters are allegories. The "episodes" or "digressions" relate by theme to the monsters as representatives of individualism, vengeance, and greed. Giving them added unity is the fact that they have the same recurring symbols of the treasure, hall, guard, intruder, as does the rest of the poem.

Sigemund, as has already been mentioned, fought his dragon alone. He appropriates the treasure of the dragon, and takes it away in his ship. He incorporates two aspects of the monsters into his story. Sigemund is noticeably a very individualistic person. He usually fights with his nephew Fitela, but there is no mention of the rest of a comitatus. In fact, the poet says that men did not know of his exploits or of his "wide sipas" (877) [far wanderings]. He seems to have become famous after his death. This story is related after Beowulf's most successful fight against Grendel. Beowulf will become famous while he lives. Sigemund remained the ideal hero; he did not change or decline, but remained a warrior. Heremod, in contrast, changes for the worse. He is as much an individual as Sigemund. He kills members of his own comitatus and refuses to distribute treasure (1710-1720). These two men have different solutions to the problem of the role of the hero.

In the story of Finn and Hengest all three aspects occur. The death of Hnaef causes Hengest to plot revenge. When the rest of his men leave, Hengest stays at the court of Finn, an exile in spirit because

while preserving a loyal front, he is in fact plotting and thinking about his native land. Finn had been forced to make peace terms which relied exclusively on exchange of treasure. He also gives Hengest a hall which would help to preserve the honour of the men who had decided to follow their leader's murderer. This is, of course, expressly against the rules of the comitatus. They have no honour to preserve in the hall, only the newly acquired treasure. Even this treasure was not sufficient, for when Hengest kills Finn, he and his men steal all the treasure that they can find and carry it to their ships, and they carry off the queen Hildeburh as well. As the lay finishes, Wealhtheow, the queen, wearing treasure in the form of a diadem, comes to Hrothgar, calls him "giver of treasure" (1169), and reminds him that he should give gifts which he himself has obtained from far and near. It seems to me that the treasure is the link rather than the future parallel situation between Hildeburh and Wealhtheow.

Thryth is introduced as a lay just after Beowulf arrives home to Hygelac and orders the treasure to be carried up to the hall where Hygd is queen. The purpose of the lay is to emphasize that the queen is in a way the treasure of the people. She "dwells within the walls of the strong hold"; it is the duty of her people and of her lord to protect and rescue her. She could be captured and removed from her hall in the same way as treasure. She had then a certain role to perform, a certain way in which she was expected to behave. Thryth is another example of a person who decides to go "one against all". She destroyed the comitatus by refusing to act as a queen; instead she had the members of the comitatus killed, if they dared to look at her. When she married Offa, she was no longer alone, and consequently bound by her feeling towards someone else to enact the role of queen.

Hrothgar tried to cement a peace agreement with Ingeld by the marriage of his daughter Freawaru. This episode occurs after a description of Wealhtheow, the "nation's pledge of peace," walking amongst the guests in the hall, distributing treasure. Freawaru also intended to be a pledge of peace, but this is not what happened. Freawaru went to her husband with a group of Danish lords who, like her, were adorned with many forms of treasure. Some of this had been the treasure of the Heathobards,

Ingeld's tribe. The Danes are intruders into the hall of the Heathobards as Hengest was an intruder into the hall of Finn. One of the Heathobard warriors kills a Danish lord who is wearing his father's sword. The oath of peace and the oath of hospitality are broken, and Ingeld's love for his wife decreases as hostility on both sides rises. This story is a specific instance of treasure being the gunpowder in an explosive situation, and of a woman, as treasure, being as useless as any golden circlet to keep peace between hostile men who are intent on revenge. The warrior who kills the Dane does so to avenge his father's death, and afterwards is forced to become an outcast.

The bride who goes to her hall is gold adorned. The queen who is captured and taken away is stripped of her treasure "golde berefene" (2931). In the battle of Ravenswood, which is the subject of the last episode, Ongentheow comes to the rescue of his queen, who has been captured, and kills Haethcyn. He then retreats to a fortification where he can defend his treasures, his wife and his children. Hygelac pursues him to the burh and in the ensuing fight Eofor kills Ongentheow. He strips the body of its armour and takes these spoils to Hygelac, receiving land, treasure, and a wife in return. This death has remained unavenged. When Beowulf dies, the Swedes will remember this and attack.

The message of the episodes is clear: revenge is futile and mutually destructive, treasure is useless in any form as a guarantee, the state of exile in or out of the heroic society is of no benefit to the society. The relationship of these episodes to the structure and theme of the poem will be discussed in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Beowulf dramatizes a hero who lives up to the highest standards of the heroic ideal. It incorporates as well an assortment of persons and events in which the heroic ideal was shattered. The final perception that we, as the audience, are led to make is that even if the warriors had lived up to the heroic ideal, the ideal itself was, in the end, not worth the effort. The poem is about the failure of the comitatus. Even the three heroes, who react to their role in different ways, are to be blamed for the fact that they are all destructive. Hrothgar, by his decision to let Grendel possess Heorot and to retire elsewhere, weakened the moral fibre of his comitatus until not one of them dared to fight. Hygelac takes his comitatus on a raid against a nation with whom he was not at war, and dies disastrously with great loss of treasure. Beowulf protects the present, but not the future of his tribe. The episodes relate to this general theme, because they too are all concerned with a comitatus that failed. Sigemund fights alone with his nephew; Heremod refuses to give gifts, and murders his own men. Hengest breaks oaths he has made and does not avenge Hnaef. Thryth kills the bravest of the men who dare look at her. Ingeld's men break the oath of hospitality through the greater claim of kinship. Hygelac rewards Eofor, who killed Ongentheow to avenge the death of Haethcyn, who was killed to avenge the seizure of the Swedish queen ...

The opposition of beginnings and ends, which is often seen as the structure of the poem, is the opposition between the high point and the low in the moral value of the heroic system. The funeral of Scyld and the funeral of Beowulf, both with their lavish description of treasure, mark the different emotional levels of what we should feel as audience. The first funeral remains a glorious, splendid tribute to Scyld.

The last funeral is a requiem ~~in~~ the Ragnarok of the comitatus. Beowulf's death is almost, if not quite, self-induced. The guardian and the intruder on his soul-treasure have become one. His heroic self succumbs to his real self. In this extreme of isolation, Beowulf commits the worst crime which was possible in that he is a form of kin-slayer. The poet therefore ironically stresses that Beowulf feels that this is the one crime of which he cannot be accused. Beowulf is a kin-slayer in more than this sense of being self-destructive. He is a kin-slayer because he belongs to a group of men who believe that the ideal is to fight and kill in order to prove themselves, to win glory or gold, to take revenge. The poet leaves this unwritten moral as the truth behind the poem; he does not point with a specifically gnomic or Christian passage to such a truth. His position is such that it matters little whether he is a Christian or not. It remains for him that killing for any motive is futile, and finally self-destructive.

The evil of this world is symbolized in the poem by the hot destructive flames in which so many things find their end. Heorot burns through the hatred between members of the same kin; Beowulf's hall is destroyed in the fiery breath of the dragon. Hildeburh's brother and son perish on the same funeral pyre, having been part of a quarrel which broke oaths of peace and hospitality. The dragon finally burns his own corpse after Beowulf has stabbed him to death. The funeral pyre of Beowulf consumes his body and the glory of the treasure he had won. The soul which goes to hell ends in flames. There remains the soul of the righteous man, which alone outlives the decay of this earthly system. To me, Beowulf is still guiltless, however much we recognize that he was at fault in his conception of himself. Society decreed that men should, and could, act in a way which was bound to destroy that same society. Some aspect of the treasure that is in Beowulf himself, which we recognize, even if he did not, remains.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," J.R.R. Tolkien. From Proceedings of the British Academy, XXII (1936), 245-95.

²A. Bonjour, Twelve Beowulf Papers, 127.

³D. Whitelock, The Audience of Beowulf, 17.

Chapter I

¹J. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," rep. in The Beowulf Poet. ed. Fry, 38.

²E. Stanley, Continuations and Beginnings, 108.

³M. Goldsmith, "The Christian Theme of Beowulf," MAE, XXIX (1960), 83.

⁴Ibid., 84.

⁵A. Bonjour: Twelve Beowulf Papers, 72.

⁶Tolkien, 39.

⁷Ibid., 21.

⁸N. Chadwick, "The Monsters and Beowulf," 180.

⁹Ibid., 193.

¹⁰J. L. Baird, "Grendel the Exile," NM, LXVII (1966), 377.

¹¹Klaeber, lii.

¹²A. Bonjour, Twelve Beowulf Papers, 110.

¹³Ibid., 103.

¹⁴Chadwick, 200.

¹⁵J. Leyerle, "Beowulf, The Hero and King," MAE (1965), 89.

¹⁶Ibid. 97.

¹⁷See Sisam, The Structure of Beowulf, 78. I prefer a simpler explanation: that in this work the poet was not much concerned with Christianity and paganism. Beowulf was a hero mainly because of his deeds.

¹⁸p. F. Fisher, "The Trials of the Epic Hero in Beowulf," PMLA, LXXIII (1958), 171.

¹⁹A. Dubois, "The Unity of Beowulf," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 378-9.

²⁰Tolkien, 40.

²¹Dubois, "The Unity of Beowulf," 376.

²²Fisher, 171.

²³K. Sisam, "Beowulf's fight with the Dragon," RES, IS (1958), 132.

²⁴J. Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," UTQ, XXXVII (1967), 14.

²⁵H. Rogers, "Three Great Fights," RES, VI (Oct., 1955), 339-355.

Chapter II

¹S. Greenfield, "Beowulf and Epic Tragedy," in Studies in Old English Literature in honor of A. G. Brodeur, 105.

²Fisher, "The Trials of the Epic hero in Beowulf," 178.

³Bonjour, Twelve Beowulf Papers, 105.

⁴Levy, The Sword from the Rock, 15.

⁵Ibid., 15.

⁶McNamee, Honor and the Epic Hero, 68.

⁷Levy, 175.

⁸Ibid., 96.

⁹cf. Greenfield, A Critical History of Old English Literature, 85.

¹⁰Levy, 215.

¹¹Usually too, the hero died young, a fact which increased the tragedy; as the society then does not benefit as it could from his virtue.

¹²Unlike the *ὑβρισ*, of other heroes whose overconfidence makes them do battle against impossible odds, and who thereby defy the wrath of the gods, Beowulf's fault does not make him choose impossible feats to attempt. Dragon killings by one man had been successful. His fault is not like that of Roland, Achilles, Hector, or Byrhtnoth, because they knew that what they were doing endangered the lives of all their army. Beowulf thought he was saving his people.

¹³D. Gillam, "A Method for Determining Connotations of Old English Poetic Words," SGG, VI (1964), 85-101.

¹⁴cf. Fortunes of Men (37).

¹⁵There is a probable pun in "manscada." See Baird, "Grendel the Exile," 377.

¹⁶cf. bana - Beowulf (2053).

lað - Beowulf (511).

¹⁷Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, 107.

¹⁸Kaske, R.E. "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," 450.

Chapter III

¹N. Chadwick, 172.

²K. Malone, "Symbolism in Beowulf," 90.

³Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, 19.

⁴Ibid., 93.

⁵Grettis saga, E. V. Gordon. Oxford, 1957, 104.

⁶Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," 11.

⁷Ibid., 12.

⁸See the Ingeld episode, Beowulf, 2047 ff.

⁹Sisam, "Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon" 130-131, n.3. The references are 2285, 2747, 3084, 3104, 3102, 2796.

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Abbreviations

<u>CM:</u>	Classica et Medevalia
<u>MAE:</u>	Medium Aevum
<u>Neophil:</u>	Neophilogus
<u>NM:</u>	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
<u>PMLA:</u>	Publications of the Modern Language Association
<u>RES:</u>	Review of English Studies
<u>SN:</u>	Studia Neophilologica
<u>SP:</u>	Studies in Philology
<u>UTQ:</u>	University of Toronto Quarterly

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